

THE LADY OF THE FOUNTAIN.

from *THE BOY'S MABINOGION* (1884)

by Siney Lanier

KING ARTHUR was at Caerlleon-upon-Usk; and one day he sat in his chamber, and with him were Owain (1) the son of Urien,(1) and Kynon the son of Clydno, and Kai the son of Kyner, and Gwenhwyvar and her hand-maidens at needle-work by the window. And if it should be said that there was a porter at Arthur's palace, there was none. Glewlwyd Gavaelvawr was there, acting as porter, to welcome guests and strangers, and to receive them with honor, and to inform them of the manners and customs of the court, and to direct those who came to the hall or to the presence- chamber, and, those who, came to take up their lodging.

(1) This "Owain" is *Owen*, and his father "Urien" is the "King Uriens of Gore" (Gore is probably Gower, in Glamorganshire, Wales), familiar to all the young readers of "The Boy's King Arthur."

In the centre of the chamber King Arthur sat upon a seat of green rushes, over which was spread a covering of flame-colored satin, and a cushion of red satin was under his elbow.

Then Arthur spoke. "If I thought you would not disparage me," said he, "I would sleep while I wait for my repast; and you can entertain one another with relating tales, and can obtain a flagon of mead and some meat from Kai."

And the king went to sleep. So Kai (2) went to the kitchen and to the mead-cellar, and returned bearing a flagon of mead, and a golden goblet, and a handful of skewers upon which were broiled collops of meat. Then they ate the collops, and began to drink the mead.

"Now," said Kai, "it is time for you to give me my story."

"Kynon," said Owain, "do thou pay to Kai the tale that is his due."

"Truly," said Kynon, "thou art older, and art a better teller of tales, and hast seen more marvellous things than I: do thou therefore pay Kai his tale."

"Begin thyself," quoth Owain, "with the best that thou knowest."

"I will do so," answered Kynon. "I was the only son of my mother and father, and I was exceedingly aspiring, and my daring was very great. I thought there was no enterprise in the world too mighty for me; and, after I had achieved all the adventures that were in my own country, I equipped myself, and set forth to journey through deserts and distant regions. And at length it chanced that I came to the fairest valley in the world, wherein

were trees of equal growth; and a river ran through the valley, and a path was by the side of the river. And I followed the path until mid-day, and continued my journey along the remainder of the valley until the evening; and at the extremity of a plain I came to a large and lustrous castle, at the foot of which was a torrent. And I approached the castle; and there I beheld two youths with yellow, curling hair, each with a frontlet of gold upon his head, and clad in a garment of yellow satin, and they had gold clasps upon their insteps. In the hand of each of them was an ivory bow, strung with the sinews of the stag; and their arrows had shafts of the Bone of the whale, and were winged with peacock's feathers; the shafts also had golden heads. And they had daggers with blades of gold, and with hilts of the bone of the whale. And they were shooting their daggers.

(2) This is "Sir Kay the seneschal," who nicknames Beaumains, and figures everywhere in Malory's *King Arthur* as a cheerful but somewhat hasty-witted knight.

And a little way from them I saw a man in the prime of life, with his beard newly shorn, clad in a robe and a mantle of yellow satin; and round the top of his mantle was a band of gold lace. On his feet were shoes of variegated leather, fastened by two bosses of gold. When I saw him, I went towards him and saluted him; and such was his courtesy that he no sooner received my greeting than he returned it. And he went with me towards the castle. Now, there were no dwellers in the castle, except those who were in one hall. And there I saw four and twenty damsels embroidering satin at a window. And this I tell thee, Kai, that the least fair of them was fairer than the fairest maid thou hast ever beheld in the Island of Britain; and the least lovely of them was more lovely than Gwenhwyvar, the wife of Arthur, when she has appeared loveliest at the Offering, on the day of the Nativity, or at the feast of Easter. They rose up at my coming, and six of them took my horse and divested me of my armor. And six others took my arms and washed them in a vessel until they were perfectly bright. And the third six spread cloths upon the tables and prepared meat. And the fourth six took off my soiled garments and placed others upon me; namely, an under-vest and a doublet of fine linen, and a robe, and a surcoat, and a mantle of yellow satin with a broad gold band upon the mantle. And they placed cushions, both beneath and around me, with coverings of red linen; and I sat down. Now, the six maidens who had taken my horse unharnessed him as well as if they had been the best squires in the Island of Britain. Then, behold, they brought bowls of silver wherein was water to wash, and towels of linen, some green, and some white; and I washed. And in a little while the man sat down to the table. And I sat next to him; and below me sat all the maidens, except those who waited on us. And the table was of silver, and the cloths upon the table were of linen; and no vessel was served upon the table that was not either of gold, or of silver, or of buffalo-horn. And our meat was brought to us. And verily, Kai, I saw there every sort of meat and every sort of liquor that I have ever seen elsewhere; but the meat and the liquor were better served there than I have ever seen them in any other place.

"Until the repast was half over, neither the man nor any one of the damsels spoke a single word to me; but, when the man perceived that it would be more agreeable to me to converse than to eat any more, he began to inquire of me who I was. I said I was glad to find that there was some one who would discourse with me, and that it was not considered so great a crime at that court for people to hold converse together.

"'Chieftain,' said the man, 'we would have talked to thee sooner, but we feared to disturb thee during thy repast: now, however, we will discourse.'

"Then I told the man who I was, and what was the cause of my journey, and said that I was seeking whether any one was superior to me, or whether I could gain the mastery over all. The man looked upon me; and he smiled, and said, 'If I did not fear to distress thee too much, I would show thee that which thou seekest.'

"Upon this I became anxious and sorrowful; and, when the man perceived it, he said, 'If thou wouldst rather that I should show thee thy disadvantage than thine advantage, I will do so. Sleep here to-night, and in the morning arise early, and take the road upwards through the valley until thou reachest the wood through which thou earnest hither. A little way within the wood thou wilt meet with a road branching off to the right, by which thou must proceed until thou comest to a large sheltered glade with a mound in the centre. And thou wilt see a black man of great stature on the top of the mound. He is not smaller in size than two of the men of this world. He has but one foot, and one eye in the middle of his forehead. And he has a club of iron; and it is certain that there are no two men in the world who would not find their burden in that club. And he is not a comely man, but, on the contrary, he is exceedingly ill-favored; and he is the woodward of that wood. And thou wilt see a thousand wild animals grazing around him. Inquire of him the way out of the glade; and he will reply to thee briefly, and will point out the road by which thou shalt find that which thou art in quest of.'

"And long seemed that night to me. And the next morning I arose and equipped myself, and mounted my horse, and proceeded straight through the valley to the wood; and I followed the cross-road which the man had pointed out to me, till at length I arrived at the glade. And there was I three times more astonished at the number of wild animals that I beheld than the man had said I should be. And the black man was there, sitting upon the top of the mound. Huge of stature as the man had told me that he was, I found him to exceed by far the description he had given me of him. As for the iron club which the man had told me was a burden for two men, I am certain, Kai, that it would be a heavy weight for four warriors to lift; and this was in the black man's hand. And he only spoke to me in answer to my questions. Then I asked him what power he held over those animals.

"'I will show thee, little man,' said he.

"And he took his club in his hand, and with it he struck a stag a great blow, so that he brayed vehemently; and at his braying the animals came together, as numerous as the stars in the sky, so that it was difficult for me to find room in the glade to stand among them. There were serpents, and dragons, and divers sorts of animals. And he looked at them, and bade them go and feed; and they bowed their heads, and did him homage as vassals to their lord.

"Then the black man said to me, 'Seest thou now, little man, what power I hold over these animals?'

"Then I inquired of him the way, and he became very rough in his manner to me: however, he asked me whither I would go. And when I told him who I was, and what I sought, he directed me.

"Take," said he, "that path that leads towards the head of the glade, and ascend the wooded steep until thou comest to its summit; and there thou wilt find an open space like to a large valley, and in the midst of it a tall tree, whose branches are greener than the greenest pine-trees. Under this tree is a fountain, and by the side of the fountain a marble slab, and on the marble slab a silver bowl attached by a chain of silver so that it may not be carried away. Take the bowl and throw a bowlful of water upon the slab, and thou wilt hear a mighty peal of thunder, so that thou wilt think that heaven and earth are trembling with its fury. With the thunder there will come a shower so severe, that it will be scarce possible for thee to endure it and live. And the shower will be of hailstones; and after the shower the weather will become fair, but every leaf that was upon the tree will have been carried away by the shower. Then a flight of birds will come and alight upon the tree; and in thine own country thou didst never hear a strain so sweet as that which they will sing. And, at the moment thou art most delighted with the song of the birds, thou wilt hear a murmuring and complaining coming towards thee along the valley. And thou wilt see a knight upon a coal-black horse, clothed in black velvet, and with a pennon of black linen upon his lance; and he will ride unto thee to encounter thee with the utmost speed. If thou fleest from him, he will overtake thee; and, if thou abidest there, as sure as thou art a mounted knight he will leave thee on foot. And if thou dost not find trouble in that adventure thou needest not seek it during the rest of thy life."

"So I journeyed on until I reached the summit of the steep, and there I found every thing as the black man had described it to me. And I went up to the tree, and beneath it I saw the fountain, and by its side the marble slab, and the silver bowl fastened by the chain. Then I took the bowl, and cast a bowlful of water upon the slab; and thereupon, behold, the thunder came, much more violent than the black man had led me to expect. And after the thunder came the shower: and of a truth I tell thee, Kai, that there is neither man nor beast that could endure that shower and live; for not one of those hail-stones would be stopped, either by the flesh or by the skin, until it had reached the bone. I turned my horse's flank towards the shower, and placed the beak of my shield over his head and neck, while I held the upper part of it over my own head. And thus I withstood the shower. When I looked on the tree, there was not a single leaf upon it; and then the sky became clear, and with that, behold the birds lighted upon the tree, and sang. And truly, Kai, I never heard any melody equal to that, either before or since. And, when I was most charmed with listening to the birds, lo, a murmuring voice was heard through the valley, approaching me, and saying, 'O knight! what has brought thee hither? What evil have I done to thee, that thou shouldst act towards me and my possessions as thou hast this day? Dost thou not know that the shower to-day has left in my dominions neither man nor beast alive that was exposed to it?'"

"And thereupon, behold, a knight on a black horse appeared, clothed in jet-black velvet, and with a tabard of black linen about him. And we charged each other; and, as the onset was furious, it was not long before I was overthrown. Then the knight passed the shaft of

his lance through the bridle-rein of my horse, and rode off with the two horses, leaving me where I was. And he did not even bestow so much notice upon me as to imprison me, nor did he despoil me of my arms. So I returned along the road by which I had come. And, when I reached the glade where the black man was, I confess to thee, Kai, it is a marvel that I did not melt down into a liquid pool, through the shame that I felt at the black man's derision. And that night I came to the same castle where I had spent the night preceding. And I was more agreeably entertained that night than I had been the night before; and I was better feasted, and I conversed freely with the inmates of the castle, and none of them alluded to my expedition to the fountain, neither did I mention it to any; and I remained there that night. When I arose on the morrow, I found ready saddled a dark-bay palfrey, with nostrils as red as scarlet; and, after putting on my armor and leaving there my blessing, I returned to my own court. And that horse I still possess, and he is in the stable yonder; and I declare that I would not part with him for the best palfrey in the Island of Britain.

"Now of a truth, Kai, no man ever before confessed to an adventure so much to his own discredit; and verily it seems strange to me that neither before nor since have I heard of any person besides myself who knew of this adventure, and that the subject of it should exist within King Arthur's dominions without any other person lighting upon it."

"Now," quoth Owain, "would it not be well to go and endeavor to discover that place?"

"By the hand of my friend," said Kai, "often dost thou utter that with thy tongue which thou wouldst not make good with thy deeds."

"In very truth," said Gwenhwyvar, "it were better thou wert hanged, Kai, than to use such uncourteous speech towards a man like Owain."

"By the hand of my friend, good lady," said Kai, "thy praise of Owain is not greater than mine."

With that Arthur awoke, and asked if he had not been sleeping a little.

"Yes, lord," answered Owain, "thou hast slept a while."

"Is it time for us to go to meat?"

"It is, lord," said Owain.

Then the horn for washing was sounded, and the king and all his household sat down to eat. And when the meal was ended Owain withdrew to his lodging and made ready his horse and his arms.

On the morrow, with the dawn of day, he put on his armor, and mounted his charger, and travelled through distant lands and over desert mountains. And at length he arrived at the valley which Kynon had described to him; and he was certain that it was the same

that he sought. And, journeying along the valley by the side of the river, he followed its course till he came to the plain and within sight of the castle. When he approached the castle, he saw the youths shooting their daggers in the place where Kynon had seen them, and the yellow man, to whom the castle belonged, standing hard by. And no sooner had Owain saluted the yellow man than he was saluted by him in return.

And he went forward towards the castle, and there he saw the chamber; and when he had entered the chamber he beheld the maidens working at satin embroidery, in chairs of gold. And their beauty and their comeliness seemed to Owain far greater than Kynon had represented to him. And they arose to wait upon Owain, as they had done to Kynon; and the meal which they set before him gave more satisfaction to Owain than it had done to Kynon.

About the middle of the repast, the yellow man asked Owain the object of his journey. And Owain made it known to him, and said, "I am in quest of the knight who guards the fountain."

Upon this the yellow man smiled, and said that he was as loth to point out that adventure to Owain as he had been to Kynon. However, he described the whole to Owain, and they retired to rest.

The next morning Owain found his horse made ready for him by the damsels; and he set forward, and came to the glade where the black man was. And the stature of the black man seemed more wonderful to Owain than it had done to Kynon; and Owain asked of him his road, and he showed it to him. And Owain followed the road, as Kynon had done, till he came to the green tree; and he beheld the fountain, and the slab beside the fountain with the bowl upon it. And Owain took the bowl, and threw a bowlful of water upon the slab. And, lo, the thunder was heard; and after the thunder came the shower, much more violent than Kynon had described; and after the shower the sky became bright. And when Owain looked at the tree there was not one leaf upon it. And immediately the birds came, and settled upon the tree, and sang. And, when their song was most pleasing to Owain, he beheld a knight coming towards him through the valley; and he prepared to receive him and encountered him violently. Having broken both their lances, they drew their swords and fought blade to blade. Then Owain struck the knight a blow through his helmet, head-piece, and visor, and through the skin, and the flesh, and the bone, until it wounded the very brain. Then the black knight felt that he had received a mortal wound, upon which he turned his horse's head and fled. And Owain pursued him, and followed close upon him, although he was not near enough to strike him with his sword. Thereupon Owain descried a vast and resplendent castle. And they came to the castle-gate. And the black knight was allowed to enter, and the portcullis was let fall upon Owain; and it struck his horse behind the saddle, and cut him in two and carried away the rowels of the spurs that were upon Owain's heels. And the portcullis descended to the floor. And the rowels of the spurs and part of the horse were without; and Owain, with the other part of the horse, remained between the two gates, and the inner gate was closed, so that Owain could not go thence; and Owain was in a perplexing situation. And, while he was in this state, he could see through an aperture in the gate a street facing him, with a row of

houses on each side. And he beheld a maiden, with yellow curling hair, and a frontlet of gold upon her head; and she was clad in a dress of yellow satin, and on her feet were shoes of variegated leather. And she approached the gate, and desired that it should be opened.

"Heaven knows, lady," said Owain, "it is no more possible for me to open to thee from hence than it is for thee to set me free."

"Truly," said the damsel, "it is very sad that thou canst not be released, and every woman ought to succor thee; for I never saw one more faithful in the service of ladies than thou. As a friend thou art the most sincere, and as a lover the most devoted. Therefore," quoth she, "whatever is in my power to do for thy release, I will do it. Take this ring, and put it on thy finger with the stone inside thy hand, and close thy hand upon the stone. And as long as thou concealest it it will conceal thee. When they have consulted together, they will come forth to fetch thee in order to put thee to death; and they will be much grieved that they cannot find thee. And I will await thee on the horseblock yonder; and thou wilt be able to see me, though I cannot see thee: therefore come and place thy hand upon my shoulder, that I may know that thou art near me. And by the way that I go hence do thou accompany me."

Then she went away from Owain, and he did all that the maiden had told him. And the people of the castle came to seek Owain to put him to death; and, when they found nothing but the half of his horse, they were sorely grieved.

And Owain vanished from among them, and went to the maiden, and placed his hand upon her shoulder; whereupon she set off. And Owain followed her until they came to the door of a large and beautiful chamber; and the maiden opened it, and they went in and closed the door. And Owain looked around the chamber; and behold there was not even a single nail in it that was not painted with gorgeous colors; and there was not a single panel that had not sundry images in gold portrayed upon it.

The maiden kindled a fire, and took water in a silver bowl, and put a towel of white linen on her shoulder, and gave Owain water to wash. Then she placed before him a silver table inlaid with gold, upon which was a cloth of yellow linen, and she brought him food. And of a truth Owain had never seen any kind of meat that was not there in abundance; but it was better cooked there than he had ever found it in any other place. Nor did he ever see so excellent a display of meat and drink as there. And there was not one vessel from which he was served that was not of gold or of silver. And Owain ate and drank until late in the afternoon, when, lo, they heard a mighty clamor in the castle. And Owain asked the maiden what that outcry was.

"They are administering extreme unction," (3) said she, "to the nobleman who owns the castle."

(3) The last rite of the church to a dying person.

And Owain went to sleep.

And a little after daybreak they heard an exceeding loud clamor and wailing. And Owain asked the maiden what was the cause of it.

"They are bearing to the church the body of the nobleman who owned the castle."

And Owain rose up and clothed himself, and opened a window of the chamber, and looked towards the castle. And he could see neither the bounds nor the extent of the hosts that filled the streets. And they were fully armed. And a vast number of women were with them, both on horseback and on foot; and all the ecclesiastics in the city, singing. And it seemed to Owain that the sky resounded with the vehemence of their cries, and with the noise of the trumpets, and with the singing of the ecclesiastics. In the midst of the throng he beheld the bier, over which was a veil of white linen; and wax tapers were burning beside and around it, and none that supported the bier was lower in rank than a powerful baron.

Never did Owain see an assemblage so gorgeous with satin and silk and sendal. And following the train he beheld a lady, with yellow hair falling over her shoulders, and stained with blood, and about her a dress of yellow satin, which was torn. Upon her feet were shoes of variegated leather. And it was a marvel that the ends of her fingers were not bruised, from the violence with which she smote her hands together. Truly she would have been the fairest lady Owain ever saw, had she been in her usual guise. And her cry was louder than the shout of the men or the clamor of the trumpets. No sooner had he beheld the lady than he became inflamed with her love, so that it took entire possession of him.

Then he inquired of the maiden who the lady was.

"Heaven knows," replied the maiden, "she may be said to be the fairest, and the most chaste, and the most liberal, and the wisest, and the most noble, of women; and she is my mistress. And she is called the 'Countess of the Fountain,' the wife of him whom thou didst slay yesterday."

"Verily," said Owain, "she is the woman that I love best."

"Verily," said the maiden, "she shall also love thee not a little."

And with that the maid arose, and kindled a fire, and filled a pot with water and placed it to warm; and she brought a towel of white linen and placed it around Owain's neck; and she took a goblet of ivory and a silver basin, and filled them with warm water, wherewith she washed Owain's head. Then she opened a wooden casket and drew forth a razor whose haft was of ivory, and upon which were two rivets of gold. And she shaved his beard, and she dried his head and his throat with the towel. Then she rose up from before Owain, and brought him to eat. And truly Owain had never so good a meal not was he ever so well served.

When he had finished his repast, the maiden arranged his couch.

"Come here," said she, "and sleep, and I will go and woo for thee."

And Owain went to sleep; and the maiden shut the door of the chamber after her, and went towards the castle. When she came there, she found nothing but mourning and sorrow; and the countess in her chamber could not bear the sight of any one through grief. Luned came and saluted her; but the countess answered her not. And the maiden bent down towards her, and said, "What aileth thee, that thou answerest no one to-day?"

"Luned," said the countess, "what change hath befallen thee, that thou hast not come to visit me in my grief? It was wrong in thee, and I having made thee rich--it was wrong in thee that thou didst not come to see me in my distress. That was wrong in thee. As it is, I will banish thee."

"I am glad," said Luned, "that thou hast no other cause to do so than that I would have been of service to thee where thou didst not know what was to thine advantage. And henceforth evil betide whichever of us shall make the first advance towards reconciliation to the other; whether I should seek an invitation from thee, or thou of thine own accord shouldst send to invite me."

With that Luned went forth. And the countess arose, and followed her to the door of the chamber, and began coughing loudly. And, when Luned looked back, the countess beckoned to her, and she returned to the countess.

"In truth," said the countess, "evil is thy disposition but, if thou knowest what is to my advantage, declare it to me."

"I will do so," quoth she.

"Thou knowest that except by warfare and arms it is impossible for thee to preserve thy possessions. Delay not, therefore, to seek some one who can defend them."

"And how can I do that?" said the countess.

"I will tell thee," said Luned. "Unless thou canst defend the fountain, thou canst not maintain thy dominions; and no one can defend the fountain, except it be a knight of Arthur's household. And I will go to Arthur's court; and ill betide me if I return thence without a warrior who can guard the fountain as well as, or even better than, he who defended it formerly."

"That will be hard to perform," said the countess. "Go, however, and make proof of that which thou hast promised."

Luned set out, under the pretence of going to Arthur's court; but she went back to the chamber where she had left Owain. And she tarried there with him as long as it might have taken her to have travelled to the court of King Arthur. And at the end of that time

she apparelled herself, and went to visit the countess. And the countess was much rejoiced when she saw her, and inquired what news she brought from the court.

"I bring thee the best of news," said Luned, "for I have compassed the object of my mission. When wilt thou that I should present to thee the chieftain who has come with me hither?"

"Bring him here to visit me to-morrow at mid-day," said the countess, "and I will cause the town to be assembled by that time."

And Luned returned home. And the next day, at noon, Owain arrayed himself in a coat and a surcoat and a mantle of yellow satin upon which was a broad band of gold lace; and on his feet were high shoes of variegated leather, which were fastened by golden clasps in the form of lions. And they proceeded to the chamber of the countess.

Right glad was the countess of their coming, and she gazed steadfastly upon Owain, and said, "Luned, this knight has not the look of a traveller."

"What harm is there in that, lady?" said Luned.

"I am certain," said the countess, "that no other man than this chased the soul from the body of my lord."

"So much the better for thee, lady," said Luned; "for, had he not been stronger than thy lord, he could not have deprived him of life. There is no remedy for that which is past, be it as it may."

"Go back to thine abode," said the countess, "and I will take counsel."

The next day the countess caused all her subjects to assemble, and showed them that her earldom was left defenceless, and that it could not be protected but with horse and arms, and military skill.

"Therefore," said she, "this is what I offer for your choice: either let one of you take me, or give your consent for me to take a husband from elsewhere to defend my dominions."

So they came to the determination that it was better that she should have permission to marry some one from elsewhere. And thereupon she sent for the bishops and archbishops to celebrate her nuptials with Owain. And the men of the earldom did Owain homage.

And Owain defended the fountain with lance and sword. And this is the manner in which he defended it: whensoever a knight came there, he overthrew him and sold him for his full worth, and what he thus gained he divided among his barons and his knights; and no man in the whole world could be more beloved than he was by his subjects. And it was thus for the space of three years.

It befell that as Gwalchmai (4) went forth one day with King Arthur he perceived him to be very sad and sorrowful. And Gwalchmai was much grieved to see Arthur in this state, and he questioned him, saying, "Oh, my lord! what has befallen thee?"

(4) This Gwalchmai--a name which in Old British means *Hawk of Battle*--is our old friend "Sir Gawaine" of *The Boy's King Arthur*. The French romancers appear to have transformed his name from the old legendary "Gwalchmai" to "Gawaine." He was noted in Welsh poetry as one of the three golden-tongued knights of Arthur's court whose persuasions none could resist; and this may account for the strange subjection of Arthur to his influence in leading the king, against the king's will and desire, to war upon Sir Launcelot during those last days described in Sir Thomas Malory's book.

"In sooth, Gwalchmai," said Arthur, "I am grieved concerning Owain, whom I have lost these three years; and I shall certainly die if the fourth year passes without my seeing him. Now I am sure that it is through the tale which Kynon, the son of Clydno, related, that I have lost Owain."

"There is no need for thee," said Gwalchmai, "to summon to arms thy whole dominions on this account; for thou thyself and the men of thy household will be able to avenge Owain if he be slain, or to set him free if he be in prison, and if alive to bring him back with thee." And it was settled according to what Gwalchmai had said.

Then Arthur and the men of his household prepared to go and seek Owain; and their number was three thousand, besides their attendants. And Kynon, the son of Clydno, acted as their guide. And Arthur came to the castle where Kynon had been before; and when he came there the youths were shooting in the same place, and the yellow man was standing hard by. When the yellow man saw Arthur, he greeted him and invited him to the castle. And Arthur accepted his invitation, and they entered the castle together. And, great as was the number of his retinue, their presence was scarcely observed in the castle, so vast was its extent. And the maidens rose up to wait on them; and the service of the maidens appeared to them all to excel any attendance they had ever met with; and even the pages who had charge of the horses were no worse served that night than Arthur himself would have been in his own palace.

The next morning, Arthur set out thence with Kynon for his guide, and came to the place where the black man was. And the stature of the black man was more surprising to Arthur than it had been represented to him. And they came to the top of the wooded steep, and traversed the valley till they reached the green tree, where they saw the fountain, and the bowl, and the slab. And upon that Kai came to Arthur, and spoke to him.

"My lord," said he, "I know the meaning of all this; and my request is that thou wilt permit me to throw the water on the slab, and to receive the first adventure that may befall."

And Arthur gave him leave.

Then Kai threw a bowlful of water upon the slab, and immediately there came the thunder, and after the thunder the shower. And such a thunderstorm they had never known before, and many of the attendants who were in Arthur's train were killed by the shower. After the shower had ceased the sky became clear, and on looking at the tree they beheld it completely leafless. Then the birds descended upon the tree; and the song of the birds was far sweeter than any strain they had ever heard before. Then they beheld a knight on a coal-black horse, clothed in black satin, coming rapidly towards them. And Kai met him and encountered him, and it was not long before Kai was overthrown. And the knight withdrew, and Arthur and his host encamped for the night.

And when they arose in the morning they perceived the signal of combat upon the lance of the knight. And Kai came to Arthur and spoke to him.

"My lord," said he, "though I was overthrown yesterday, if it seem good to thee I would gladly meet the knight again to-day."

"Thou mayst do so," said Arthur.

And Kai went towards the knight. And on the spot he overthrew Kai, and struck him with the head of his lance in the forehead, so that it broke his helmet and the headpiece, and pierced the skin and the flesh the breadth of the spear-head, even to the bone. And Kai returned to his companions.

After this, all the household of Arthur went forth one after the other to combat the knight, until there was not one that was not overthrown by him except Arthur and Gwalchmai. And Arthur armed himself to encounter the knight.

"Oh, my lord!" said Gwalchmai, "permit me to fight with him first."

And Arthur permitted him. And he went forth to meet the knight, having over himself and his horse a satin robe of honor which had been sent him by the daughter of the Earl of Rhangyw; and in this dress he was not known by any of the host. And they charged each other, and fought The Lady of the 1-bziilaiiii. 25 all that day until the evening; and neither of them was able to unhorse the other.

The next day they fought with strong lances, and neither of them could obtain the mastery.

And the third day they fought with exceeding strong lances. And they were incensed with rage, and fought furiously, even until noon. And they gave each other such a shock that the girths of their horses were broken, so that they fell over their horses' cruppers to the ground. And they rose up speedily and drew their swords and resumed the combat. And the multitude that witnessed their encounter felt assured that they had never before seen two men so valiant or so powerful. And, had it been midnight, it would have been light from the fire that flashed from their weapons. And the knight gave Gwalchmai a blow that turned his helmet from off his face, so that the knight knew that it was

Gwalchmai. Then Owain said, "My lord Gwalchmai, I did not know thee for my cousin, owing to the robe of honor that enveloped thee. Take my sword and my arms."

Said Gwalchmai, "Thou, Owain, art the victor. Take thou my sword."

And with that Arthur saw that they were conversing, and advanced towards them.

"My lord Arthur," said Gwalchmai, "here is Owain, who has vanquished me and will not take my arms."

"My lord," said Owain, "it is he that has vanquished me and he will not take my sword."

"Give me your swords," said Arthur, "and then neither of you has vanquished the other."

Then Owain put his arms around Arthur's neck, and they embraced. And all the host hurried forward to see Owain, and to embrace him; and there was nigh being a loss of life, so great was the press.

And they retired that night, and the next day Arthur prepared to depart.

"My lord," said Owain, "this is not well of thee; for I have been absent from thee these three years, and during all that time, up to this very day, I have been preparing a banquet for thee, knowing that thou wouldst come to seek me. Tarry with me, therefore, until thou and thy attendants have recovered the fatigues of the journey and have been anointed."

And they all proceeded to the castle of the Countess of the Fountain. And the banquet which had been three years preparing was consumed in three months. Never had they a more delicious or agreeable banquet. And Arthur prepared to depart. Then he sent an embassy to the countess, [beseeching] her to permit Owain to go with him for the space of three months, that he might show him to the nobles and the fair dames of the Island of Britain. And the countess gave her consent, although it was very painful to her. So Owain came with Arthur to the Island of Britain. And, when he was once more amongst his kindred and friends, he remained three years, instead of three months, with them.

And, as Owain one day sat at meat in the city of Caerlleon-upon-Usk, behold a damsel entered, upon a bay horse with a curling mane and covered with foam; and the bridle and so much as was seen of the saddle were of gold. And the damsel was arrayed in a dress of yellow satin. And she came up to Owain, and took the ring from off his hand.

"Thus," said she, "shall be treated the deceiver, the traitor, the faithless, the disgraced, and the beardless."

And she turned her horse's head, and departed.

Then his adventure came to Owain's remembrance, and he was sorrowful; and, having finished eating, he went to his own abode and made preparations that night. And the next

day he arose, [yet] did not go to the court, but wandered to the distant parts of the earth and to uncultivated mountains. And he remained there until all his apparel was worn out, and his body was wasted away, and his hair was grown long. And he went about with the wild beasts, and fed with them, until they became familiar with him. But at length he grew so weak that he could no longer bear them company. Then he descended from the mountains to the valley, and came to a park that was the fairest in the world and belonged to a widowed countess.

One day the countess and her maidens went forth to walk by a lake that was in the middle of the park; and they saw the form of a man. And they were terrified. Nevertheless, they went near him, and touched him, and looked at him. And they saw that there was life in him, though he was exhausted by the heat of the sun. And the countess returned to the castle, and took a flask full of precious ointment and gave it to one of her maidens.

"Go with this," said she, "and take with thee yonder horse and clothing, and place them near the man we saw just now. And anoint him with this balsam, near his heart; and if there is life in him he will arise through the efficacy of this balsam. Then watch what he will do."

And the maiden departed from her, and poured the whole of the balsam upon Owain, and left the horse and the garments hard by, and went a little way off and hid herself to watch him. In a short time she saw him begin to move his arms. And he rose up and looked at his person, and became ashamed of the unseemliness of his appearance. Then he perceived the horse and the garments that were near him. And he crept forward till he was able to draw the garments to him from off the saddle. And he clothed himself, and with difficulty mounted the horse. Then the damsel discovered herself to him, and saluted him. And he was rejoiced when he saw her, and inquired of her what land and what territory that was.

"Truly," said the maiden, "a widowed countess owns yonder castle. At the death of her husband he left her two earldoms; but at this day she has [only] this one dwelling that has not been wrested from her by a young earl who is her neighbor, because she refused to become his wife."

"That is pity," said Owain.

And he and the maiden proceeded to the castle. And he alighted there; and the maiden conducted him to a pleasant chamber, and kindled a fire, and left him.

And the maiden came to the countess, and gave the flask into her hand.

"Ha, maiden!" said the countess, "where is all the balsam?"

"Have I not used it all?" said she.

"Oh, maiden!" said the countess, "I cannot easily forgive thee this. It is sad for me to have wasted seven-score pounds' worth of precious ointment upon a stranger whom I know not. However, maiden, wait thou upon him until he is quite recovered."

And the maiden did so, and furnished him with meat and drink and fire and lodging and medicaments until he was well again. And in three months he was restored to his former guise, and became even more comely than he had ever been before.

One day Owain heard a great tumult and a sound of arms in the castle, and he inquired of the maiden the cause thereof.

"The earl," said she, "whom I mentioned to thee, has come before the castle with a numerous army, to subdue the countess."

And Owain inquired of her whether the countess had a horse and arms in her possession.

"She has the best in the world," said the maiden.

"Wilt thou go and request the loan of a horse and arms for me," said Owain, "that I may go and look at this army?"

"I will," said the maiden.

And she came to the countess, and told her what Owain had said. And the countess laughed.

"Truly," said she, "I will even give him a horse and arms forever--such a horse and such arms had he never yet. And I am glad that they should be taken by him to-day, lest my enemies should have them against my will to-morrow. Yet I know not what he would do with them."

The countess bade them bring out a beautiful black steed upon which was a beechen saddle, and a suit of armor for man and horse. And Owain armed himself, and mounted the horse and went forth, attended by two pages completely equipped with horses and arms. And, when they came near to the earl's army, they could see neither its extent nor its extremity. And Owain asked the pages in which troop the earl was.

"In yonder troop," said they, "in which are four yellow standards: two of them are before, and two behind, him."

"Now," said Owain, "do you return, and await me near the portal of the castle."

So they returned; and Owain pressed forward until he met the earl. And Owain drew him completely out of his saddle and turned his horse's head towards the castle, and, though it was with difficulty, he brought the earl to the portal, where the pages awaited

him. And in they came. And Owain presented the earl as a gift to the countess, and said to her, "Behold a requital to thee for thy blessed balsam."

The army encamped around the castle. And the earl restored to the countess the two earldoms he had taken from her, as a ransom for his life; and for his freedom he gave her the half of his own dominions, and all his gold and his silver and his jewels, besides hostages.

And Owain took his departure. And the countess and all her subjects besought him to remain; but Owain chose rather to wander through distant lands and deserts.

And as he journeyed he heard a loud yelling in a wood. And it was repeated a second and a third time. And Owain went towards the spot, and beheld a huge craggy mound in the middle of the wood, on the side of which was a gray rock. And there was a cleft in the rock, and a serpent was within the cleft. And near the rock stood a black lion; and every time the lion sought to go thence the serpent darted towards him to attack him. And Owain unsheathed his sword, and drew near to the rock; and, as the serpent sprang out, he struck him with his sword and cut him in two. And he dried his sword, and went on his way as before. But, behold, the lion followed him and played about him as though it had been a greyhound that he had reared.

They proceeded thus throughout the day until the evening. And when it was time for Owain to take his rest he dismounted, and turned his horse loose in a flat and wooded meadow. And he struck fire, and when the fire was kindled the lion brought him fuel enough to last for three nights. And the lion disappeared. And presently the lion returned, bearing a fine large roebuck. And he threw it down before Owain, who went towards the fire with it.

And Owain took the roebuck, and skinned it, and placed collops of its flesh upon skewers around the fire. The rest of the buck he gave to the lion to devour. While he was doing this, he heard a deep sigh near him, and a second, and a third. And Owain called out to know whether the sigh he heard proceeded from a mortal, and he received answer that it did.

"Who art thou?" said Owain.

"Truly," said the voice, "I am Luned, the handmaiden of the Countess of the Fountain."

"And what dost thou here?" said Owain.

"I am imprisoned," said she, "on account of the knight who came from Arthur's court and married the countess. And he staid a short time with her; but he afterwards departed for the court of Arthur, and has not returned since. And he was the friend I loved best in the world. And two of the pages in the countess' chamber traduced him, and called him a deceiver. And I told them that they two were not a match for him alone. So they imprisoned me in the stone vault, and said that I should be put to death unless he came

himself to deliver me by a certain day; and that is no further off than the day after to-morrow. And I have no one to send to seek him for me. And his name is Owain, the son of Urien."

"And art thou certain that if that knight knew all this he would come to thy rescue?"

"I am most certain of it," said she.

When the collops were cooked, Owain divided them into two parts, between himself and the maiden; and after they had eaten they talked together until the day dawned. And the next morning Owain inquired of the damsel if there was any place where he could get food and entertainment for that night.

"There is, lord," said she. "Cross over yonder and go along the side of the river, and in a short time thou wilt see a great castle in which are many towers; and the earl who owns that castle is the most hospitable man in the world. There thou mayst spend the night."

Never did sentinel keep stricter watch over his lord than the lion that night over Owain.

And Owain accoutred his horse, and passed across by the ford, and came in sight of the castle. And he entered it, and was honorably received. And his horse was well cared for, and plenty of fodder was placed before him. Then the lion went and laid down in the horse's manger; so that none of the people of the castle dared to approach him. The treatment which Owain met with there was such as he had never known elsewhere; for every one was as sorrowful as though death had been upon him. And they went to meat; and the earl sat upon one side of Owain, and on the other side his only daughter. And Owain had never seen any more lovely than she. Then the lion came and placed himself between Owain's feet, and he fed him with every kind of food that he took himself. And he never saw any thing equal to the sadness of the people.

In the middle of the repast the earl began to bid Owain welcome.

Then said Owain, "Behold, it is time for thee to be cheerful."

"Heaven knows," said the earl, "that it is not thy coming that makes us sorrowful; but we have cause enough for sadness and care."

"What is that?" said Owain.

"I have two sons," replied the earl, "and yesterday they went to the mountains to hunt. Now, there is on the mountain a monster who kills men and devours them; and he seized my sons. And to-morrow is the time he has fixed to be here; and he threatens that he will then slay my sons before my eyes unless I will deliver into his hands this my daughter. He has the form of a man; but in stature he is no less than a giant."

"Truly," said Owain, "that is lamentable. And which wilt thou do?"

"Heaven knows," said the earl, "it will be better that my sons should be slain against my will than that I should voluntarily give up my daughter to him to ill-treat and destroy."

Then they talked about other things; and Owain staid there that night.

The next morning they heard an exceeding great clamor, which was caused by the coming of the giant with the two youths. And the earl was anxious both to protect his castle, and to release his two sons. Then Owain put on his armor, and went forth to encounter the giant. And the lion followed him. And, when the giant saw that Owain was armed, he rushed towards him and attacked him. And the lion fought with the giant much more fiercely than Owain did.

"Truly," said the giant, "I should find no difficulty in fighting with thee, were it not for the animal that is with thee."

Upon that, Owain took the lion back to the castle and shut the gate upon him; and then he returned to fight the giant as before. And the lion roared very loud, for he heard that it went hard with Owain. And he climbed up till he reached the top of the earl's hall, and thence he got to the top of the castle; and he sprang down from the walls, and went and joined Owain. And the lion gave the giant a stroke with his paw which tore him from his shoulder to his hip, and his heart was laid bare. And the giant fell down dead. Then Owain restored the two youths to their father.

The earl besought Owain to remain with him; and he would not, but set forward towards the meadow where Luned was. And when he came there he saw a great fire kindled, and two youths with beautiful curling auburn hair were leading the maiden to cast her into the fire. And Owain asked them what charge they had against her. And they told him of the compact that was between them, as the maiden had done the night before.

"And," said they, "Owain has failed her: therefore we are taking her to be burnt."

"Truly," said Owain, "he is a good knight; and if he knew that the maiden was in such peril I marvel that he came not to her rescue. But, if you will accept me in his stead, I will do battle with you."

"We will," said the youths.

And they attacked Owain, and he was hard beset by them. And with that the lion came to Owain's assistance, and they two got the better of the young men. And they said to him, "Chieftain, it was not agreed that we should fight, save with thyself alone; and it is harder for us to contend with yonder animal than with thee."

And Owain put the lion in the place where the maiden had been imprisoned, and blocked up the door with stones; and he went to fight with the young men as before. But Owain had not his usual strength, and the two youths pressed hard upon him. And the lion roared incessantly at seeing Owain in trouble. And he burst through the wall until he

found a way out, and rushed upon the young men, and instantly slew them. So Luned was saved from being burned.

Then Owain returned with Luned to the dominions of the Countess of the Fountain. And when he went thence he took the countess with him to Arthur's court, and she was his wife as long as she lived.

And then he took the road that led to the court of the savage black man, and Owain fought with him; and the lion did not quit Owain until he had vanquished him. And when he reached the court of the savage black man he entered the hall, and beheld four and twenty ladies, the fairest that could be seen. And the garments which they had on were not worth four and twenty pence, and they were as sorrowful as death. And Owain asked them the cause of their sadness. And they said, "We are the daughters of earls, and we all came here with our husbands, whom we dearly loved. And we were received with honor and rejoicing. And we were thrown into a state of stupor; and, while we were thus, the demon who owns this castle slew all our husbands, and took from us our horses and our raiment and our gold and our silver. And the corpses of our husbands are still in this house, and many others with them. And this, chieftain, is the cause of our grief; and we are sorry that thou art come hither, lest harm should befall thee."

And Owain was grieved when he heard this. And he went forth from the castle, and he beheld a knight approaching him, who saluted him in a friendly and cheerful manner as if he had been a brother. And this was the savage black man.

"In very sooth," said Owain, "it is not to seek thy friendship that I am here."

"In sooth," said he, "thou shalt not find it then."

And with that they charged each other, and fought furiously. And Owain overcame him, and bound his hands behind his back. Then the black savage besought Owain to spare his life, and spoke thus: "My lord Owain," said he, "it was foretold that thou shouldst come hither and vanquish me; and thou hast done so. I was a robber here, and my house was a house of spoil; but grant me my life, and I will become the keeper of an hospice, and I will maintain this house as an hospice for weak and for strong as long as I live, for the good of thy soul."

And Owain accepted this proposal of him, and remained there that night.

And the next day he took the four and twenty ladies and their horses and their raiment and what they possessed of goods and jewels, and proceeded with them to Arthur's court. And, if Arthur was rejoiced when he saw him after he had lost him the first time, his joy was now much greater. And, of those ladies, such as wished to remain in Arthur's court remained there, and such as wished to depart departed.

And thenceforward Owain dwelt at Arthur's court, greatly beloved, as the head of his household, until he went away with his followers; and those were the army of three hundred ravens (5) which Kenverchyn had left him. And wherever Owain went with these he was victorious.

(5) This strange army of ravens figures in a tale given presently--"The Dream of Rhonabwy."

And this is the tale of The Lady of the Fountain.

(End.)